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where do we go from here?

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How do we move from identification of transportation projects and programs in the 2001 RTP to actual implementation? The Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) is the primary vehicle to implement the projects and programs identified in the RTP. The projects and programs identified in the RTP must be programmed in the RTIP by the county commissions and other implementing agencies. There are a number of requirements that must be met before a project of regional significance can be programmed in the RTIP. A number of steps and actions must occur to ensure that a project can be moved forward to programming.

Within the context of regional transportation planning, the first step toward strategy/program development is the Regionally Significant Transportation Investment Study (RSTIS) and /or corridor feasibility study, which is a corridor study or alternatives analysis including an NEPA “purpose and need” statement and preliminary environmental documentation. While some projects can move very quickly from idea to implementation, regionally significant strategies and programs require more in-depth study and analysis. During the course of an investment study the Region can determine the various alternatives that may help solve the problem and identify a preferred program or strategy that will be subject to a comprehensive NEPA analysis. It is the responsibility of SCAG to identify which strategies/programs should be subject to such requirements and to identify those programs/projects in the RTP as requiring further study and analysis.



### **Regionally Significant Transportation Investment Studies (RSTIS), Corridor Studies, Project Initiation Documents (PIDs) and Environmental Documents**

Under ISTEA, high capacity, federally funded highway and transit projects were required to undergo a Major Investment Study; however, pursuant to TEA-21 the requirement for a “stand-alone” MIS document was eliminated. Pending DOT planning rules require the content of the old MIS document to be reflected in the planning and project development (“NEPA linkage”) process. The Region now views the RSTIS as the process to refine or update the Regional Transportation Plan for regionally significant corridor projects. Therefore, RSTISs originate from the regional planning process and will be guided by it. SCAG, as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, in cooperation with other stakeholders, shall approve the initiation and scope of an RSTIS. Before a project can be included in the RTIP for construction, the project must be one of the alternatives in a completed RSTIS, a completed project initiation document and cleared environmental documents. The RSTIS shall be included in SCAG’s Overall Work Program.

Since RSTIS is a component of the RTP planning process, the regionally significant alternatives shall be evaluated by the Performance Indicators included in the RTP in order to be considered for incorporation in the RTP. RSTIS alternatives

include alternative modes and technology (intelligent transportation vehicles and highway systems), general alignment, number of lanes, the degree of demand management and operating characteristics. Furthermore, RSTISs are required to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of alternatives in attaining local/regional, state and national goals and objectives. This analysis shall consider the direct and indirect costs (of capital, operating and maintenance and right-of-way) of alternatives; benefits or impacts of mobility improvements; air quality requirements; social, economic and environmental impacts, including environmental justice; safety, operating efficiencies; financing (federal, state and private sources); energy consumption; and public outreach. The results of the RSTIS will help lead to a decision by SCAG, in cooperation with participating public and private organizations, on the design and scope of the investment for the RTP. The preferred alternative of an RSTIS must meet the performance and financial criteria established by the RTP and be approved by the Regional Council before being included in the RTP and Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

RSTISs are eligible for funds authorized under Sections 8, 9 and 26 of the Federal Transit Act, state planning funds and planning and capital funds appropriated under Title 23, United States Code.

RSTISs or other analyses are appropriate when regionally significant investments in the RTP do not have complete environmental analysis, design concept and scope (mode and alignment not fully determined). In these cases requiring further analysis, the RTP may stipulate either a set of assumptions concerning the proposed improvement or no-build condition pending the completion of a corridor or sub-area analysis. The RTP should have enough detail to provide a plan conformity determination.

The SCAG RSTIS Peer Review Group was established to ensure that the process for an RSTIS meets all requirements. The Peer Review Group process is the cooperative process involving SCAG, Caltrans, transit operators, environmental resource agencies and FHWA/FTA. Upon completion of the process, a Letter of Completion is issued. The letter only certifies compliance with the Peer Review Group process.

**ACTION**—Complete current Major Investment Studies underway, initiate the proposed/future RSTIS and consider incorporating resulting preferred alternatives into the RTP, based on Performance Indicators and funding availability.

**ACTION**—Complete current corridor studies on projects, corridors and subareas included in the constrained funding (first priority) and in the Unconstrained Project List (second priority).

**ACTION**—Complete project initiation documents, or their equivalent, on projects, corridors and subareas included in the constrained funding (first priority) and in the Unconstrained Project List (second priority).

**ACTION**—Complete preliminary/initial environmental documents as part of project initiation documents and comprehensive Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) or Environmental Assessments (EA) for projects in the constrained part of the RTP.